

More disgust

Korsmeyer

One might think we can distinguish that which tastes good by looking for the opposite of that which disgusts. This is the implicit assumption of those who follow the quite plausible evolutionary or biological model for basic emotions such as disgust. This emotion is often interpreted as an aversion reaction to that which is foul and toxic, thereby protecting the organism by inducing recoil and revulsion when we encounter them in nature, such as spiders or snakes. Something repellent to touch is doubly repulsive to touch with the tongue.

I have six categories that fall into two groups: one that singles out the taste experience itself, and the other that considers the nature of the object being eaten. (1) First, there are objects with initially repellent tastes, such as parsnips or cod liver oil. This includes objects that retain a residue of a substance that is disgusting, such as the decay present in gamy meat. (2) There are also a number of foods that are tasty in small quantities but cloy when one eats too much and reaches surfeit. This phenomenon is especially present with the relatively easy enjoyment of sweet things, such as cheesecake or candy. Objects in these two initial categories disgust because of their taste qualities, but there is a longer list of disgusting foodstuffs that refers to the nature of what is eaten, including two pairs of apparent opposites. (3) Objects that are too alien from ourselves and that we recoil from (4) Or objects that are too close to us, not alien enough. The prime example of this would be another human being. (5) Objects that are insufficiently removed from their natural form—i.e., that appear to be still alive and resisting. Therefore, we prepare our foods, remove meats from their skin, and so on. (6) Objects that have been dead too long and have started to decompose. This category bends back toward the first.

Where aversions can become positive pleasures:

1. Aristotle on tragedy (fear and pity, transformed by catharsis)

2. The sublime (terror; transformation of fear into delight)

3. Newer theories of horror: Disturbing spectacles transformed into aesthetic pleasure
[Noel Carroll? Aversive disgust always present; the price paid for narrative discovery]

4. K herself: the conversion of the disgusting into the delicious
[insert notions of the learned palate, the trained taste (e.g. wine tasting), educated consumption—isn't this really ideological?]

[where would we put the grotesque?]

[Is the terror of the sublime an historical/cultural phenomenon which we don't experience in a similar way with regard to certain objects—eg the Alps in 18C—but instead accept with awe?]

A newer, or revived, interest in thinking about the senses and emotions in media analysis. First, of expanding the usual conceptions of seeing and vision in media studies. Beyond the establishment of vision as a cultural and historically grounded action/experience,

media studies, particularly film studies, has not extended much further thought on the matter of the sense of sight. More recently, the rapid (and very welcome) development of sound studies within media studies has pushed the sense of hearing into almost equal prominence, recognizing that the image track is almost always accompanied by a sound track.

Yet it has seemed that the other senses: smell, taste, touch, have remained out of bounds for discussion except in odd and idiosyncratic cases: Smell-O-Vision and the joking use of scratch and sniff in John Waters film ----;

Not the representation of emotions (acting, performance) so much, but how texts themselves elicit emotions.

But this also reflects a new or revived interest in emotions in relation to art, to media. This area was to some extent eclipsed by the development of structuralism in the 1960s, and a more materialist orientation which transformed into what is now called post-structuralism in the 1970s. Particularly in its French and French influenced versions, the appeal to psychoanalysis seemed to cover, or cover over some of the same area, but psychoanalytic thought often recognized emotions principally as symptoms, and thus only of passing interest since a “deeper” origin was at stake, or a “deeper” pattern or structure.

Whereas rhetorical analysis had always been concerned with emotions (how to organize and produce art to evoke emotions as part of making a winning case in the argumentative forum), emotions were suspect. On the French side, this worked out along lines of the power of an excessive Cartesian rationality (which is always balanced among French intellectuals by a counter tendency to fly off into forms of irrationality—witness Surrealism, etc.) [fn. Barthes as example: both extreme structuralism (semiotics; S/Z, the fashion book) and extreme subjectivity (plaisir du texte, etc.)]

On the British side (more specifically, the English side) the repression of the emotions, the emotive, the subjective, matched up with the turn to psychoanalysis as a relief from having to account for a personal investment in emotions or subjectivity.

In part this goes back to previous (mostly literary) theories:

(1) rhetoric—those devices which can provoke in the audience certain emotions or effects that are desired by the speaker./maker.

(2) Romantic era notions of creativity as spontaneous and the expression of emotion in an artistic text. (expressive theories)

and was supplemented by

(3) psychological, particularly psychoanalytic, critical frameworks that examined films/texts in terms of their effect on the viewer/spectator/audience (usually due to embedded contents or forms in the creative work)

But it is also the case that traditionally, and in terms of common sense, pragmatic and daily knowledge, that emotions are linked particularly in the Western mind, and particularly in the Christian tradition, to a moral/ethical dimension or phase. Thus when we speak of emotions, or passions notice how many are automatically registered within the frame of a religious judgment: envy, jealousy, anger, love, guilt, sorrow, shame, grief, despair, and lust. They are traditionally in Judeo-Christian culture linked to a value system and proper and improper behaviors. Adam and Eve eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge and experience Shame. Jesus believes his Father has abandoned him and has Despair. Tristan and Isolde fall in Love but experience Guilt at betraying the king as liege and betrothed/wife.

By and large then, the emotions and senses have been repressed, excluded, or subordinated in media analysis.

Within North American film studies the senses have been at the center of the work of two critics.

But to account for, deal with, accept the emotions

This has become a particularly compelling issue in recent work on the horror genre. Not only has the analysis of horror gone through several remarkable critical stages in recent decades, horror itself as an entertainment genre has evolved.

To think about disgust.

First, is disgust the right term or the best one?

--all cultures and people in general have an "aversive response" that is, they develop (and it seems to be learned in childhood) an embodied and embedded visceral reaction to certain things or sense stimuli. This at its simplest level is biologically functional (don't eat this, it is repulsive, it will be bad for you); but it is also elaborated out (don't touch this, it is repulsive, it should be avoided) beyond necessity, to represent a cultural/moral stance (don't touch, don't look). In a purely cultural stance, it can be described as what Philip Slater referred to as the "toilet assumption" as a characteristic of US culture: if it is unpleasant (poverty, the homeless, etc.) avoid it, put it out of sight.

Would it be more precise to use "distress"? The uncomfortable response, pushed to the point of great discomfort, or maybe even pain. Revulsion.

But there are different aspects to aversion:

Fear, which produces avoidance or flight

Disgust, which is "in-between"

And Hatred or hostility which produces the desire to crush, send away, through action

We can also include here contempt

And horror

Disgust is an emotion

It is a reaction, but to what?

How do we specify it?

What is its source (inside us)

Is it universal?

Biological

Psychological

Adaptive

Is it conditioned by culture? Does it have a history? Does it change?

If so, how?

How do different cultures understand it?

What do different cultures find disgusting, and why?

And how can it be used in critical thought?

Textual, aesthetic analysis

Cultural analysis

Historical analysis

Different languages

Different traditions

Forbidden foods

Forbidden practices

Test__homosexual sex

Hanich: cinematic disgust

Production of disgust:

Choice of objects

Close-ups

Somatic empathy with characters

Problem---some do have the response; but some don't

To some extent people vote with their feet

Scientific images which are "disgusting"